

POST-ELECTION REPORT

MAINE'S 2020 ELECTION





PO BOX 18187
Portland, ME 04112
info@lwwme.org

lwwme.org

League of Women Voters of Maine © Copyright December 2020

Written by: Sadie Faucher, Will Hayward, Anna Kellar,
Evan Tess Murray, and Lane Sturtevant

CONTENTS

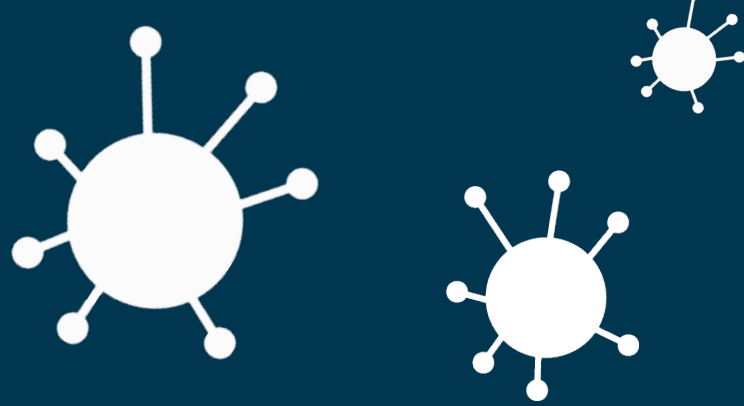
Introduction	1
Advocacy + Structural Work	4
What We Did	12
How It Went	22
What We Learned + Recommendations	30



ROVERWOOD SCHOOL
CLAYTON COUNTY, GA

INTRODUCTION

Voters wait in line in Biddeford, Maine.

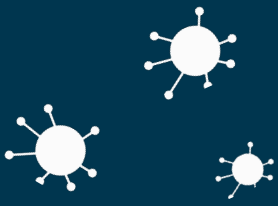


Back in April 2020, once it became clear that the emerging COVID threat would grow into a global pandemic, we knew that our primary and general elections would need protection. Free and fair elections are the essence of democracy. We would need to work with other stakeholders to meet the challenge of holding fair and accessible elections while protecting public health.

We formed a coalition with a dozen other advocacy groups. We reached out to town clerks across the state. We submitted our recommendations to the governor and secretary of state. Our mission remained consistent: to make sure that every eligible voter could participate in a safe and secure election.

Our usual programming and in-person events had to be terminated, and like the rest of the world, we adapted to Zoom and conference calls. While our voter registration drives were not as robust as in previous years, we still canvassed through our Neighbor to Neighbor program and incorporated a new Youth Council, geared towards the impressive and socially-conscious Generation Z.

There are thousands of puzzle pieces that make up an election. The administration and people-power that goes on behind the scenes is remarkable. Each medium-sized city or tiny town has its own secure



way of running an election. We were on the sidelines cheering them on but also there to provide suggestions and recommendations.

The result of all this work by advocacy groups, volunteers, election officials, town clerks, municipal workers, and the secretary of state's office is a **record voter turnout** in the 2020 election. Maine boasts a higher than average voter participation rate compared to other states. However, barriers to voting prevent some voters of lower socio-economic status, disabled voters, black, indigenous, and people of color from participating in our democracy.

This report outlines what we did. We will describe the advocacy and structural work that we adopted for the challenge of running an election during COVID. We had more than 100 volunteers on the ground on Election Day, and we have over 300 reports from the field. Finally, this report provides a few lessons on what we learned, and of course, a few recommendations.

After all, the League stands for the rights of all people to be active participants in their government. We educate voters, empower people to participate in civic life, and advocate for policies that strengthen our democracy.

— LWVME team



ADVOCACY + STRUCTURAL WORK

Voters wait in line in Buckfield, ME.



As stated in Democracy Maine's April 2020 report, [Maine: the State of our Democracy](#), Maine entered 2020 with a history of high voter participation (more than 70 percent in presidential years) and strong voting rights laws. Nonetheless, Maine fell short on key measures in the conduct of elections and modernization of election systems.

As strengths, Maine could boast that the state already provided for no-excuse absentee voting, without requiring a witness signature. Before 2020, approximately 30% of Maine voters voted absentee, either in person at their town office, or by mail. In the July 2020 primary, 57.89% of voters cast absentee ballots. Maine also has a high voter registration rate of 97-98% of eligible voters, with the advantages of same-day voter registration and having held a March 3 presidential primary when many voters updated their registrations.

However, while voters had many ways to request absentee ballots, the state did not proactively mail either request forms or ballots to all voters. Voters had

to provide their own postage (which was [cited as a source of voter confusion](#) after the July primary election), and there was no system for voters to track the delivery and acceptance of their ballot (other than calling their town clerk). Maine also was one of only 11 states that did not offer online voter registration, meaning that voters had to either register by mail (with a cut-off 19 days before the election) or in person. From an election security standpoint, the League has also long pointed out that Maine was behind the times in not having provisions for a post-election audit.

Pre-COVID, Mainer's experience of democracy also varied widely based on their location, age, race, gender and income, with the most marginalized communities often facing obstacles to full participation. As COVID exposed and deepened racial and economic disparities, special attention needed to be paid to the barriers facing Maine's BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) communities, as well disabled and low-income voters, and those at

1. In statute, Maine voters can request an absentee ballot up to three months before an election, until the Thursday before the election. After that, absentee ballots are available for voters who have a legitimate excuse. Ballots can be requested by mail, phone, in-person, and online. For the July 14 primary, an executive order allowed voters to request absentee ballots in person, without an excuse, through Election Day.



higher risk for COVID. There was also concern that the localized nature of Maine's election administration (with town and city clerks in Maine's 504 municipalities responsible for voter registration, mailing and receiving absentee ballots, and preparing and managing polling places) would lead to uneven access to voting across the state.

Maine's non-profit sector stepped up to address many of the weaknesses in our election system. Many organizations took on new or expanded civic engagement roles in the run up to the November election (the work of the League of Women Voters is detailed in an upcoming section of this report).

There also was an unprecedented coordination of voting rights advocates. In mid-March 2020, League of Women Voters of Maine convened a group of non-partisan organizations and individuals with an interest in the conduct of the elections to discuss how COVID would impact the upcoming primary and general elections.² This group met on a weekly basis through November and issued joint recommendations to the secretary of state and governor several times.³ These recommendations included expanding access to absentee voting while

ABOVE: About 150 voters wait in a long line at St. Pius Church in Portland, ME on Election Day, November 3rd. This was at 7:27 AM, shortly after the polls opened. There were long lines throughout the day at this location and several others in Portland.

2. This group included many of the organizations that had worked together in 2019 to pass Automatic Voter Registration legislation, such as Maine Conservation Voters/Maine Conservation Alliance, the ACLU of Maine, and the Center for Secure and Modern Elections. The coalition also included AFL-CIO, Maine SEIU, MSEA, Maine Equal Justice, Planned Parenthood of Northern New England, the Maine People's Alliance, NextGen Maine, the Maine Women's Lobby, AARP Maine, Maine Immigrant Rights Coalition, Gateway Community Services and RepresentUs.
3. April 6 [recommendations](#); May 1 [public petition release](#); June 5 [response](#) to Executive Orders; August 27 general election [recommendations](#).

ensuring in-person polling places were maintained in a safe manner. The coalition recommended using federal CARES Act funding to mail absentee ballot request forms, pay for postage, establish a system for online voter registration, and support the hiring of additional poll workers and administrative staff. Other recommendations included enhanced guidance on how to cure rejected absentee ballots, access to drop boxes, and online ballot tracking. Coalition members spoke several times with the secretary of state, top legislators, and the governor's staff. They also released recommendations publicly and engaged the media and the general public through a petition to the governor and weekly webinars.

Beyond advocacy, the coalition became an essential part of sharing information among organizations, problem-solving, and coordinating resources. The relationships built through weekly meetings led to coordinated poll worker recruitment, regular communication between advocates and the leadership of the Maine Town and City Clerks' Association, shared voter registration and engagement programming, and coordinated outreach to help towns and cities apply for grants from the Center for Technology and Civic Life. Working together, nonprofits were able to fill many systemic voter information and access gaps.



ABOVE: Secure absentee ballot drop boxes were a great addition to Maine's elections infrastructure. There was no central database of drop box locations. The League collected information about dropboxes for voter information, as well as to assess which towns needed additional security measures. [View our map here.](#)

EXECUTIVE ORDERS AND SOS GUIDANCE

Executive orders issued by Governor Janet Mills and guidance issued by the Office of the Secretary of State were both crucial for adjusting to the election administration challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The actions taken by the Governor and secretary of state built on actions taken in advance of Maine's primary and the lessons learned from that primary.

Executive orders issued by Governor Mills postponed the June 9 primary to July 14, gave municipalities additional flexibility in their election preparations, and expanded options for voter participation in light of the pandemic. Many of these provisions were continued or modified for the November election in Executive Order 8, issued on August 26th. The explicit authorization of absentee ballot drop boxes was reiterated, and the following provisions were modifications of orders issued for the primary:

- Mail-in and third-party registration: The deadline for mail-in and third-party registration was changed from 21 days before the election to 15 days before the election; for the primary, this had been changed from 21 days to 7 days.
- Consolidating and changing polling places: The deadline to consolidate polling places was changed from 90 days prior to the election to 30 days, and the deadline to move polling places was changed from 60 days prior to the election to 20 days. For the primary, these deadlines had been changed to 15 days for consolidation and 10 days for moving polling places.
- In-person, no-excuse absentee deadline: The deadline for in-person, no-excuse absentee voting was changed from the Thursday prior to the election to the end of the second business day before the election (Friday in most towns); for the primary no-excuse absentee voting was permitted up to and including Election Day.

These changes reflected lessons learned during the primary. For instance, allowing in-person, no-excuse absentee voting on Election Day and the day before proved to be a substantial burden for clerks that hindered their abilities to prepare for Election Day. All of the deadline changes reflected the understanding that, while there was more time to prepare for the November election than the July election, COVID-related issues still meant that clerks and voters both needed more flexibility than the pre-COVID deadlines permitted. For example, several cities and towns held meetings and made decisions about polling place consolidation and relocation in late August and early September which would not have been permitted without these deadline changes.



EO #39: An Order Modifying the Primary Election to Reduce Exposure to Covid-19
[PDF](#) — 4/10/2020

Guidance issued by the secretary of state's office to municipal clerks was also significant in shaping the election. One of the most important pieces of guidance given by the secretary of state's office related to fixing ("curing") signature errors on absentee ballot envelopes. The most common reason an absentee ballot is rejected in Maine is that it lacks the required voter signature on the absentee ballot envelope. However, there is no provision in Maine law requiring that municipal clerks contact voters with defective ballots to give them an opportunity to correct the error.

In light of the dramatic increase in first-time absentee voters due to COVID-19, the secretary of state's office issued guidance in advance of the July primary directing municipal clerks to attempt to reach voters whose ballots were rejected for a missing signature or signature mismatch to give them the opportunity to fix errors. For the November election, this guidance was strengthened: it provided detailed instructions on when clerks should contact voters with defective ballots (within 24 hours) and how to handle identity verification over the phone in varying ballot rejection scenarios. It also provided for ballots that could not be cured to be cast as "challenged ballots." Over 50% of defective ballots were eventually cured, and under 1% of absentee ballots were rejected for signature errors, both very impressive figures helped by the strong guidance given.

Other guidance issued by the secretary of state's office also helped municipalities run their elections more smoothly. Several pieces of guidance were given advising municipalities on how to interpret executive orders; these included advice on how to comply

with Maine Center for Disease Control distancing and capacity requirements, guidance on masks in town offices (mandatory for all) and at Election Day polling places (mandatory for workers, not for voters), and guidance on what constituted a compliant absentee ballot drop box. This guidance was critical for ensuring that towns could run safe, secure, and accessible elections.

The secretary of state's office also developed multiple web tools to improve the absentee voting process. One of these tools was an accessible portal to allow voters who self-certified as impaired to complete their ballots electronically, allowing them to vote safely and privately at home. This tool was added in response to a lawsuit brought by Disability Rights Maine, which claimed that visually impaired voters did not have a safe and private way to vote during the COVID-19 pandemic. The other important web tool added by the secretary of state's office was an absentee ballot tracking tool, which allowed voters to confirm that their absentee ballots had been sent to them, and received and accepted by their clerk. While some users reported errors in the information this system gave, the web tool still represented a dramatic improvement over previous elections, when voters could only confirm that a ballot had been accepted by calling their clerk.

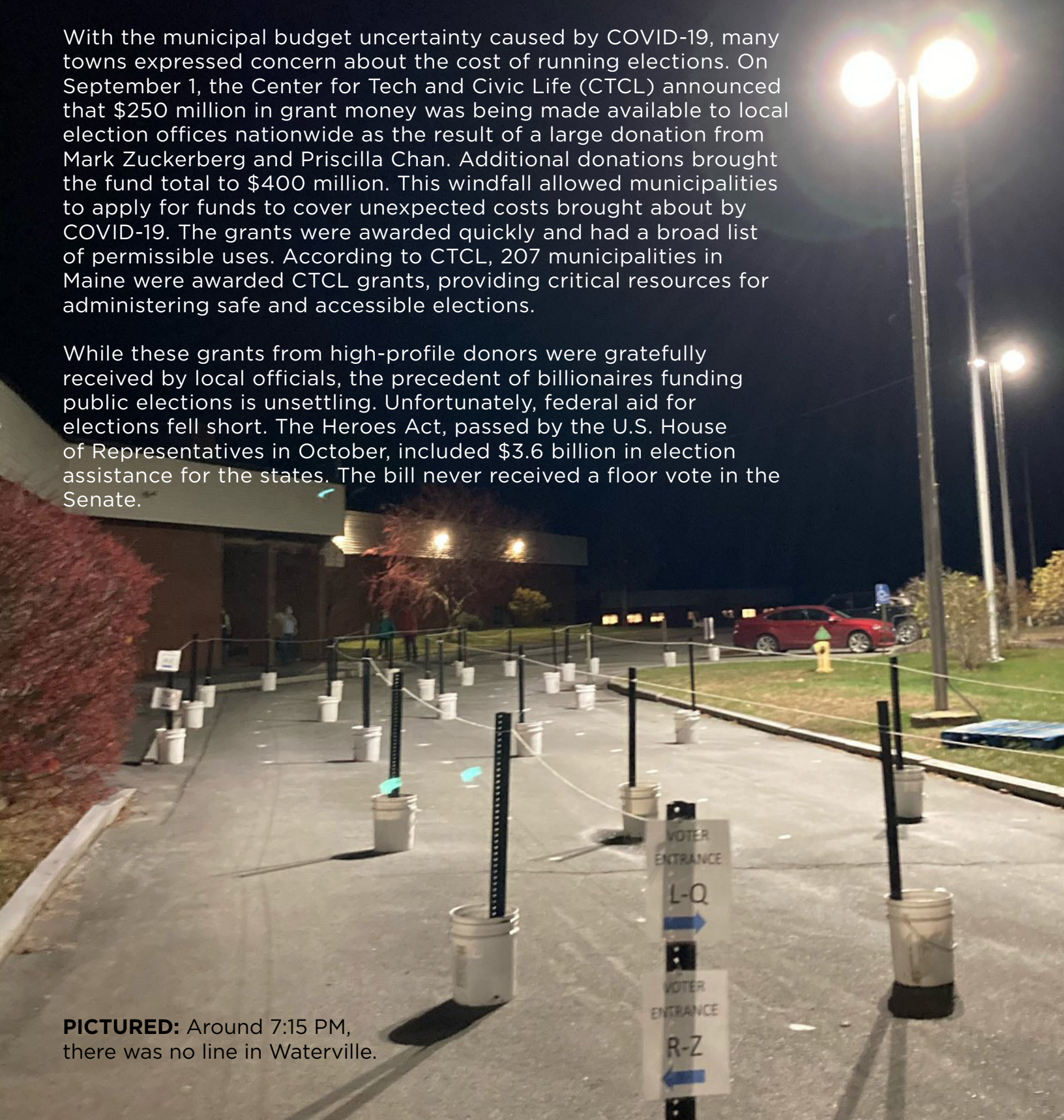
LOCAL ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

A major challenge that towns faced was having sufficient resources to conduct elections during the COVID-19 pandemic. The state provided protective and safety equipment for polling places and reimbursed 80% of the cost of purchasing drop boxes. For many other expenses, such as staff or space rental, however, towns had to rely on their municipal election budgets.

With the municipal budget uncertainty caused by COVID-19, many towns expressed concern about the cost of running elections. On September 1, the Center for Tech and Civic Life (CTCL) announced that \$250 million in grant money was being made available to local election offices nationwide as the result of a large donation from Mark Zuckerberg and Priscilla Chan. Additional donations brought the fund total to \$400 million. This windfall allowed municipalities to apply for funds to cover unexpected costs brought about by COVID-19. The grants were awarded quickly and had a broad list of permissible uses. According to CTCL, 207 municipalities in Maine were awarded CTCL grants, providing critical resources for administering safe and accessible elections.

While these grants from high-profile donors were gratefully received by local officials, the precedent of billionaires funding public elections is unsettling. Unfortunately, federal aid for elections fell short. The Heroes Act, passed by the U.S. House of Representatives in October, included \$3.6 billion in election assistance for the states. The bill never received a floor vote in the Senate.

PICTURED: Around 7:15 PM, there was no line in Waterville.





PERIOD	HOME	GUEST
1	00	00
2	00	00
3	00	00
4	00	00
5	00	00
6	00	00
7	00	00
8	00	00
9	00	00
10	00	00
11	00	00
12	00	00

HOME	PERIOD	8	Agonia
00	00	00	00
BONUS	00	00	00
FOULS	10	00	00
WON	00	00	00

PLAYERS

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	-----

VOTE SMART
STAY 6 FEET APART

WHAT WE DID

— Inside the voting location in Bath, ME.



VOTER REGISTRATION EFFORTS

The pandemic hindered many of the League's traditional in-person voter registration efforts, such as registering voters at naturalization ceremonies or large events around the state. However, some Local League chapters worked to find other, safe approaches to voter registration. The Midcoast League tabled outside libraries and a local business in the area, answering questions about voting and distributing absentee ballot request forms. They also reached out to local food pantries and distributed Making Your Vote Count brochures to several of them. The Piscataquis League tabled outside a local food pantry and church and distributed brochures to a local library. The Downeast League tabled at a free community meal site. They also set up a ballot delivery service for voters who were homebound and ended up assisting several voters with delivering their ballots, contacting the town office, or answering questions. The Capital Area League collaborated with Maine Equal Justice to organize a voter registration training so that their

volunteers could work with partner service providers to register voters.

Some members at large and other volunteers also worked to register voters in their community. Several members in Oxford County tabled at local libraries and businesses, distributing materials and answering voter questions. Another volunteer tabled at a food pantry in Brunswick and a church in Portland tabled at a city park during a farmer's market.

Maine Youth Vote, which grew out of a pilot project with Swing Left in the spring, sent voter registration materials to 907 students from 24 schools around the state. The materials were developed to make it possible for students to register and vote as easily as possible, and in many cases town clerks agreed to accept the envelope the materials arrived in as proof of address. A few school systems were already registering their senior students to vote, but many were happy to have our targeted materials as a resource.



GEN Z VOTES

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Last spring, anticipating school closures, we pulled together a team to focus on youth voter engagement. Originally the focus was meant to be youth voter registration, to replace our school-based registration drives; after the July primary, the team expanded dramatically and now comprises several projects, including a Youth Council of 47 students; a Speakers' Bureau that handles requests for League speakers; a school-based voter registration program called Maine Youth Vote (summarized below), and outreach to youth organizations and social studies teachers.

The Youth Council is an opt-in group of mainly high school students who want to engage in pro-democracy work. They participate in social media outreach and relational organizing. The Youth Council is facilitated by a Steering Committee currently made up of five very active and engaged high school

students. The Steering Committee will continue to bring the whole council together regularly for trainings and to engage them in substantive action. This program, while it was founded in advance of the election, is intended to be a sustainable way to encourage youth participation in our work and to have that work be largely driven by young people themselves.

Youth who were part of the Speakers' Bureau attended biweekly training sessions focused on public speaking, and League speakers contacted via the Bureau gave a number of presentations. The bureau grew to include adult speakers as well. Several youth participated regularly in trainings, and our youth speakers were interviewed on Maine Calling. Most of the young speakers are below voting age and were interested in making their voices heard.



VOTER ENGAGEMENT

Despite the pandemic, we restarted our Neighbor to Neighbor program, recruiting a small handful of volunteers to knock on doors and distribute literature in 20 cities and towns. We identified low-income housing and neighborhoods with large immigrant populations and offered to assist people in registering to vote as well as requesting absentee ballots. The goal of Neighbor to Neighbor is to engage with New Mainers, low-income people, and other low-propensity voters, inviting them to participate in democracy and lowering barriers to participation. Staff and volunteers knocked on 3,679 doors, had 1,940 substantive conversations, registered 124 new voters, and helped 319 voters request an absentee ballot.

Just before the election, COVID numbers began to rise, so Neighbor to Neighbor is once again on hiatus.

We also ran a text bank and attempted a phone bank. In total, we texted more than 80,000 voters with GOTV (Get Out the Vote) messaging, emphasizing voting early and, as the date approached, linking to Vote411.org. Our effectiveness was somewhat limited by technical problems getting lists from the VAN; we trained over a hundred text bankers, but by the time we were able to have them actively texting, many of them had begun volunteering in other ways. We made no calls; a late phone bank seemed low priority, as voters were saturated by then and volunteers fatigued.



NEIGHBOR TO NEIGHBOR CANVASSING STORIES

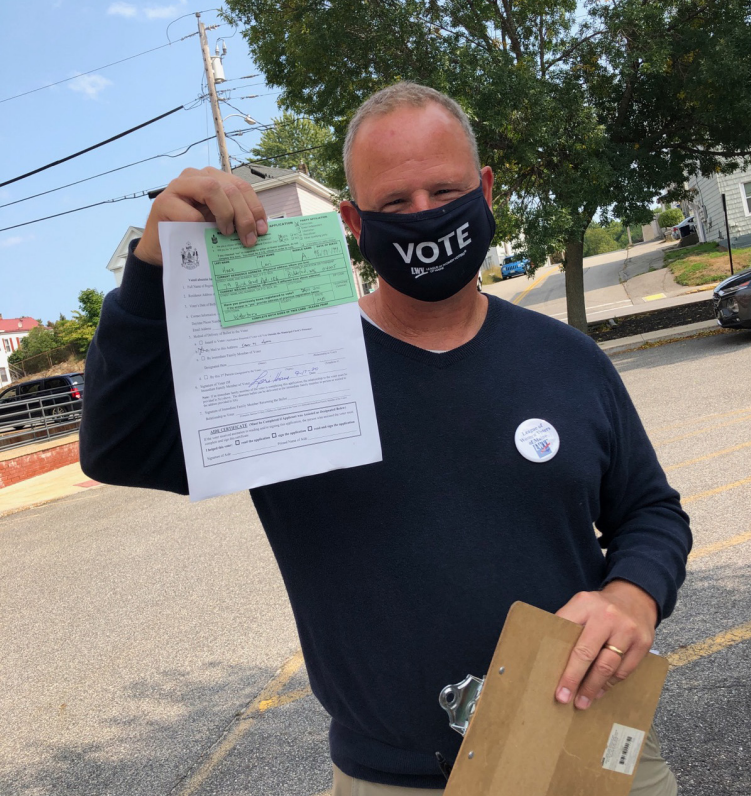
Reported by Lado Lodoka

Lewiston: “The voter who answered was 96 years old and had no way to get her absentee ballot. She lived alone. One of our volunteers drove to city hall with a letter from the voter, assigning responsibility to deliver her ballot. The volunteer brought the ballot to the voter’s house, where two of the canvassing team members were witnesses and delivered the ballot back to the clerk’s office after the voter sealed and signed the envelope. Had the volunteer not visited this voter, would she have cast a ballot? Real barriers exist for older, disabled voters.”

Gorham: “The voter was bed bound and had no way of registering to vote and requesting an absentee ballot. We registered the voter and filled out an absentee request on the spot. The voter was grateful for the service.”

Windham: “We approached several residents having a conversation and asked if they were registered to vote. One of the residents said that he is a felon and cannot vote. We informed him that felons can vote in Maine! We registered them and helped to request their absentee ballots.”

North Berwick: “I knocked at this couple’s door. The woman opened the door, and the husband joined in. She explained that they were not registered, but they don’t believe in voting. As I was about to leave, they asked, ‘Where are you from?’ I said, ‘Sudan.’ And then I added, ‘I came all the way from Sudan to register you to vote. That is how important this election is.’ They both started laughing, and the woman said, ‘That is what you should have said the first thing when I opened the door!’”





ELECTION DAY STATS

The League released weekly Monday newsletters that offered election updates, voting tips, and any data related to absentee voting. These emails were crafted and sent out starting on Monday, August 25 through Monday, November 9.

The League also posted throughout Election Day on all 3 social media platforms. These posts detailed what was happening at polling locations across Maine, with pictures and updates on long lines and COVID-19 precautions.



Email Engagement:

Nov. 2 Election Update — 22.5% Open Rate (OR)
Nov. 3 Election Day Update — 17.7% OR
Nov. 4 Post-Election Update — 21.6% OR



Facebook Engagement:

We posted 8 times. We garnered 3,801+ views across all posts, averaging 475 views per post. **On average, our Facebook posts receive 200-300 views/post.*



Twitter Engagement:

We tweeted 30 times. We garnered 9,022+ impressions across all posts, averaging 300 views per tweet. **On average, our tweets receive 150-200 views/post.*



Instagram Engagement:

We posted 2 times, and garnered 376 views. **Instagram is our least active SM platform; however, we are rapidly approaching 1,500 followers, a 200% increase from March 2020.*

VOTER PSAs — FACEBOOK/INSTAGRAM ADS



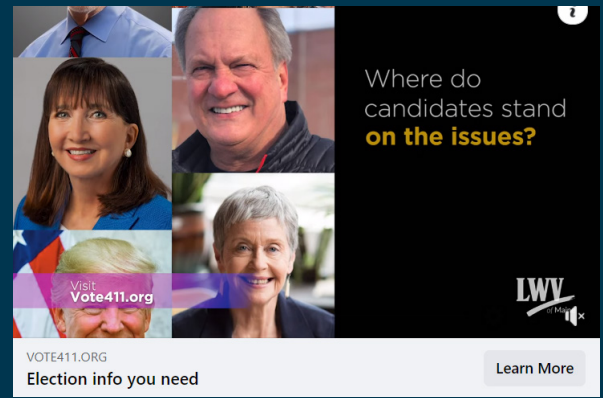
1080x1080 Graphic

Total reach: 60,355
Impressions: 496,699
Frequency rate: 8.23



1080x1080 Graphic

Total reach: 44,141
Impressions: 239,082
Frequency rate: 5.42



1920x1080 Video

Total reach: 601,595
Impressions: 1,301,776
Frequency rate: 2.16

VOTER PSAs — RADIO ADS

Maine Public Radio

Digital and radio ads ran 8/31 - 10/11

Message: *Vote early and request an absentee ballot.*

After the six week campaigns, reach and frequency for each was as follows:
90-127K Portland and 30-41K Bangor

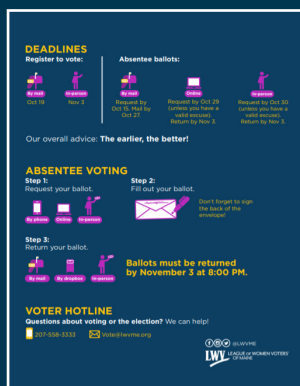
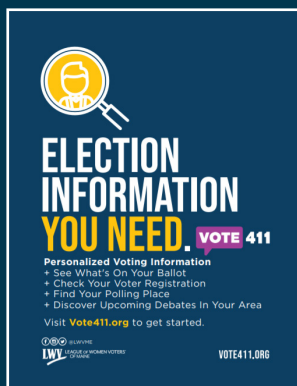
Maine Radio

Radio ads ran 10/5 - 10/27

Message: *Use Vote411.org for all election questions and needs.*

This ran for a four week campaign, airing 165 times, and targeting adults over the age of 35.

VOTER PSAs — NEWSPAPER INSERT



We created a 2-sided insert for the statewide **Maine Sunday Telegram**. This was delivered to 40,000 households.



VOTER GUIDES

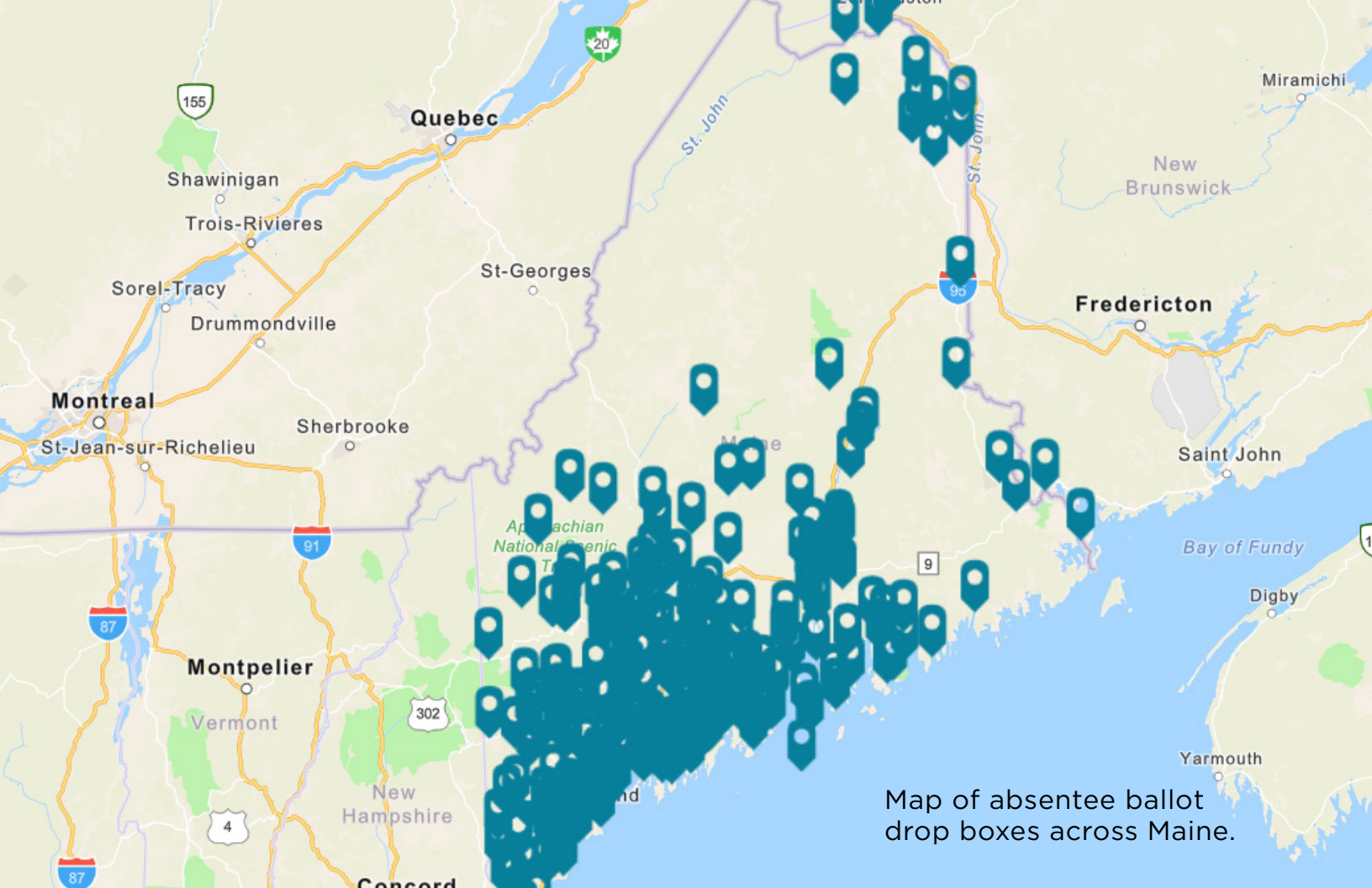
2020 saw an increased focus on voter education and engagement. Voter guide information was available both online and in print; the online version, via the League's [Vote411.org](https://www.vote411.org), covered 417 races in total, listing 819 candidates from municipal to statewide, along with 86 municipal ballot initiatives. We covered 82 municipal races in more than 50 municipalities. Ultimately, nearly 14,000 people accessed Maine's [vote411.org](https://www.vote411.org) guide at least once.

The print guide, focusing on the federal candidates, was directly mailed to 87,374 households throughout the state. Additional print guides were distributed by staff, local leagues, and libraries via the inter-library loan system. The pandemic year slowed distribution in Portland significantly, but local leagues in other parts of the state assisted in placing the guide in public locations. Ultimately, approximately 105,000 print guides were distributed statewide. As always, the guide was well-received; we also received hotline calls from people who had picked up a guide.

CANDIDATE FORUMS

Collectively, Local League chapters hosted candidate forums for four Maine State Senate districts and nine Maine State House districts, as well as sponsoring a city council and a school committee candidate forum. A total of forty candidates participated in these forums. Most of these forums were conducted as Zoom webinars and many were also simultaneously live-streamed on the League of Women Voters of Maine's Facebook page. The Bangor City Council and Bangor School Committee candidate forums were live-streamed on YouTube. All of the forums were recorded and can be found at lwvme.org/Forums.

- Bangor League: Bangor City Council and Bangor School Committee
- Capital Area League: House Districts 81, 83, 86, 85; Senate District 14 and 15
- Downeast League: House Districts 132, 135, and 136; Senate District 7
- Midcoast League: House District 93; Senate District 12
- Portland Area League: House District 29



VOTER ASSISTANCE

We started a voter assistance hotline in early October, staffed by League staff and volunteers. It received, in total, 62 calls and texts. Hotline volunteers assisted with simple questions but would also call town clerks or do research and then follow up. Hotline users expressed gratitude. One memorable call was from someone in a very long line to register and vote early who was concerned she didn't have the correct proof of address; she didn't want to wait for hours and then be turned away.

Complementing the hotline, the "Help ME Vote" collaborative Facebook group we created with coalition partners in the spring remained active, and in a few cases served as a crowdsourcer, as other users joined the discussion. It received

a question every few days throughout September and October, all of them answered within a day.

Questions about which towns would have drop boxes to return ballots came in frequently, and we ultimately created an interactive drop box map (available at lvme.org/AbsenteeMap), with a pin for each town. Each pin, when selected, displays relevant information, including whether the town has a drop box, the clerk's contact information, and office hours. Where possible, it also includes a photo of the drop box. Staff and volunteers continued to update it through Election Day; most drop boxes are permanent installations, so it will continue to be useful in future elections. At present, more than 250 cities and towns are represented on the map.



HOUSE DISTRICT
23
L - Q

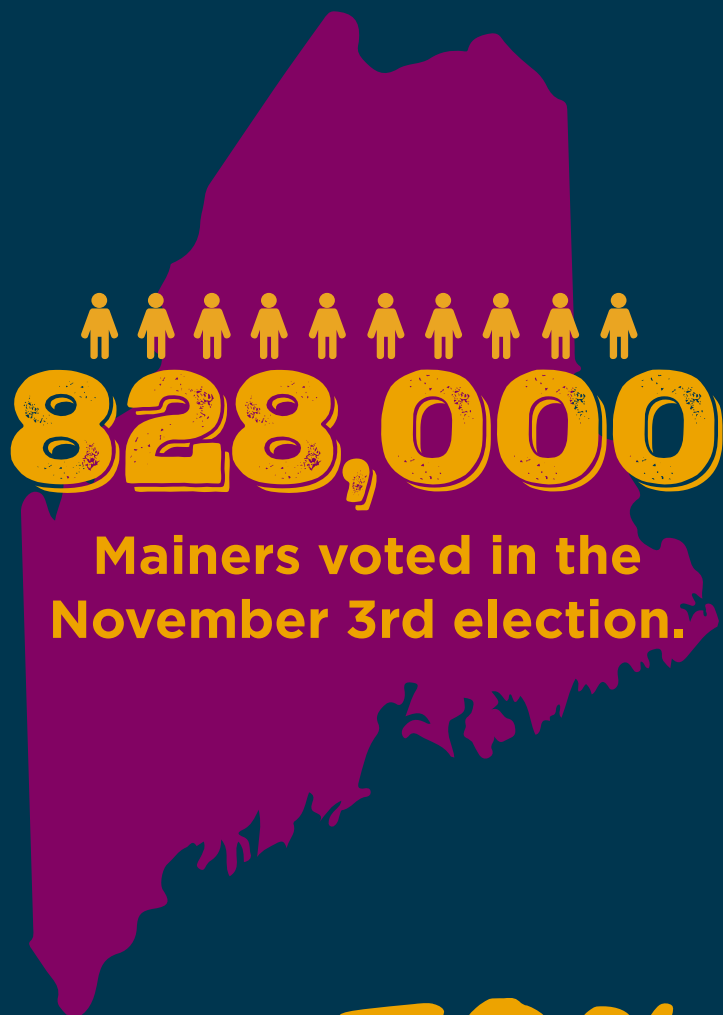
HOUSE DISTRICT
23
E - K

VOTER CHECK-IN
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
SEAT
23
E - K

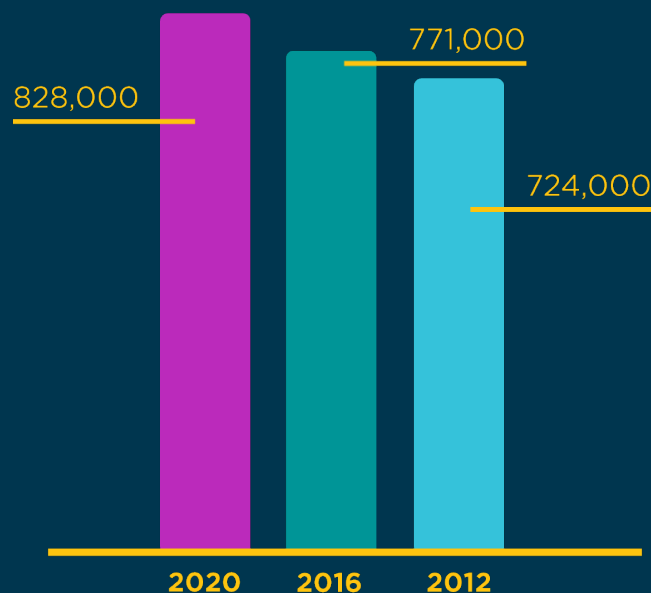
VOTER CHECK-IN
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
SEAT
23
L - Q

HOW IT WENT

— Inside the voting location in Standish, ME.



VOTER PARTICIPATION



78% of eligible voters participated in the election.

TURNOUT

Overall, Maine had extremely high turnout for the November election, with over 828,000 Mainers casting ballots. This total represents about 78% of Maine's voting eligible population, the second-highest percentage in the country. This was a substantial increase from the approximately 771,000 ballots cast in 2016 and 724,000 ballots cast in 2012, and reflects both Maine's historically high turnout rates as well as the surge in turnout seen this year across the country.

ABSENTEE VOTING

As of 3:00 p.m. on Election Day, 507,486 valid absentee ballots had been cast in the November election. This total represents approximately 61% of all votes cast in the election. This is an increase from the 58% absentee percentage in the July primary, and a dramatic increase from the 30-35% absentee percentage in prior elections. Because a majority of ballots were cast absentee by mail, drop box, or in person, Election Day lines that were slowed due to COVID-19 protocols generally remained manageable.

Statewide, based on those preliminary results, only around 0.6% of all returned absentee ballots were rejected, an impressively low figure. Even this figure overstates the number of voters who were rejected; of the 3,147 rejected ballots, 42% had the rejection reason “spoiled by voter;” in most cases, these voters came to town offices to cast a replacement ballot in person. Of all of the absentee ballots that were listed as rejected for all reasons, ultimately at least 80% of these voters eventually cast a ballot.

-
4. This is the most recent absentee data made available by the secretary of state’s office at the time this report was compiled.

507,486

Mainers voted with an absentee ballot.



61%

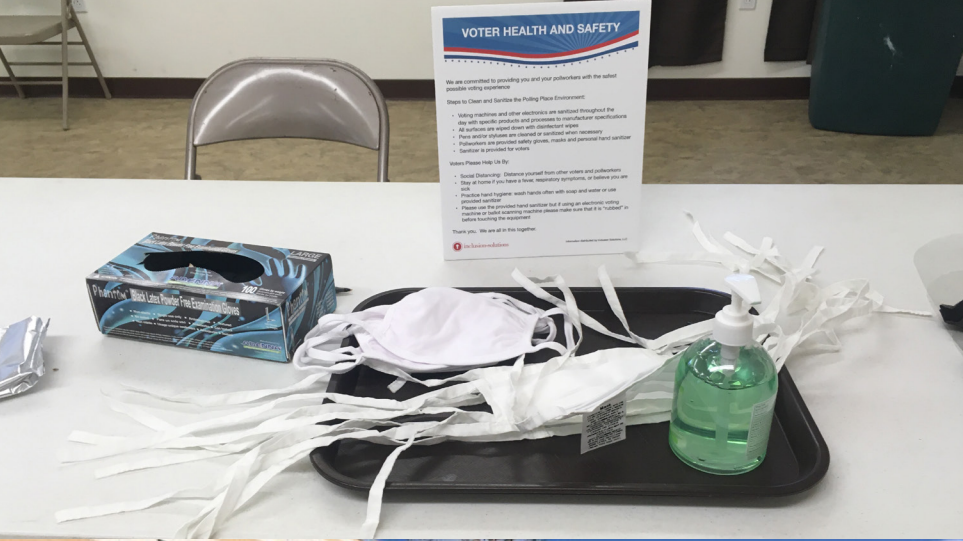
of all votes were casted absentee.



Only 0.6% of all returned absentee ballots were rejected.



LONG LINES IN AUGUSTA: The City Center in Augusta experienced long lines throughout the day, sometimes as long as a 2 hour wait. Volunteers, including members from the League of Women Voters of Maine, contacted Pizza to the Polls to have pizza delivered and feed hungry voters waiting in line.



Approximately 95.5% of the 162 polling locations upheld high COVID standards.



Some musical accompaniment for voters entering the East End School polling place in Portland.



A poll worker cleans the booths in Wiscasset.



Voters in Rangeley voted at the local fire station.

ELECTION PROTECTION

The League ran several [Election Protection](#) programs to ensure that Mainers could vote safely, votes were counted securely, and that the integrity of our elections was protected. LWVME hosted dozens of informational sessions and Election Protection trainings to get volunteers prepped for Election Day.

CLERK MEETINGS

To ensure that there was a steady line of communication between town clerks and our staff working to support them, a group of advocates, led by the League, began meeting weekly with representatives of the Maine Town and City Clerks' Association. These check-ins allowed us to have a better understanding of what officials were dealing with in their jurisdictions and what we could do as stakeholders to help. Both clerks and advocates found the meetings useful, and they are scheduled to continue beyond the election.

ADOPT A TOWN CLERK

Given Maine's decentralized election system of 504 individual election jurisdictions, we saw a need to create a database to keep track of local election information.

We launched our Adopt a Town Clerk program to reach out to town clerks across the state to share resources and also hear about how they were preparing for the upcoming election. We trained volunteers to contact clerks using a guided questionnaire to share resources, such as our Poll

Worker Recruits and CTCL grants. Our volunteers contacted 318 municipalities and had 210 completed responses.

POLL WORKERS

Among other shortages caused by the COVID pandemic was a drastic shortage of poll workers in some communities, since many seasoned workers were in the high-risk group. To address this, we partnered with Power to the Polls (PTP) and coalition partners (Maine People's Alliance, Maine Conservation Voters, Maine Women's Lobby, and AFL-CIO) to fill poll worker needs across the state. We recruited over 3,785 volunteers and were able to confirm interest and eligibility with 1,183 of them. On Election Day, we had 27 volunteers that were placed to serve as poll workers in their communities.

ELECTION OBSERVERS

This year we launched Maine's first statewide non-partisan election observation program. Our goal was to observe the election process in all counties across the state. Before election day, we trained over 104 volunteers to observe the November 3 general election.

Using historical data and information gained from our Adopt a Town Clerk Program, we concluded that we should observe 163 key election jurisdictions. We observed the election in a variety of ways including roving, indoor, and outdoor observation from the opening to closing of polling locations. Our volunteers filed 315 individual observation reports.

During our observations, we found zero disruptions of any kind in the polling

locations. Of the 163 polling locations that were monitored by the League on Election Day, observers noted that there were approximately 98 locations with a 10-minute wait to vote. Longer wait lines of 45 minutes or more affected approximately 25 locations, including Augusta, Portland, and Biddeford.

Observers monitored compliance with COVID precautions, such as poll workers wearing masks, the use of plexiglass barriers, and social distancing in any wait lines. Approximately 94% of the 163 polling locations upheld high COVID standards. The remaining sites may not have used plexiglass barriers, or staff

might have inconsistently worn face masks while polling sites were open.

One challenge was gaining access inside the polls. State law makes no provision for non-party observers. Election officials were rightly concerned about state-mandated limits on gatherings, and we found ourselves negotiating for space on a case-by-case basis.

Overall, our Election Day program ran smoothly. Our observations helped to reassure the public that the election was safe, secure, and accessible.

Will Hayward out in the field on Election Day, observing various poll locations for COVID precautions.



WARREN
Wing

HOME 8888 GUEST 88
Waybrook
Community Center

HOME PERIOD
GUEST

L - P

L - P

WHAT WE LEARNED + RECOMMENDATIONS

Inside the voting location in Westbrook, ME.



The 2020 elections, conducted in the extremely unusual and trying circumstances of a pandemic, provide many lessons about Maine's successes and areas to improve. Based on the League's observation and advocacy work, media reports and conversations with clerks, and the available election data, the League offers its perspective on a few lessons that can be learned from this year to apply to future elections.

PRESERVING AND EXPANDING ABSENTEE VOTING IMPROVEMENTS

One of the great triumphs of this year's elections was the expansion and increased ease of absentee voting. Affirming the ability of towns to offer absentee drop boxes, the state made it easier for municipalities to offer voters more ways to safely return their ballots. In the future, the secretary of state's office can preserve and expand this ballot return method by developing agency rules around drop box use and permitting municipalities to have more than one drop box, which was not allowed in 2020. Additionally, tools developed for this election, such as the absentee ballot status tracker, can be further refined to improve accuracy and voter confidence.

Extending the absentee ballot processing window to seven days before the election was crucial for giving clerks enough time to prepare and count all ballots on election night. This change should be enshrined in legislation so clerks can manage their workload in the week leading up to and on Election Day and expand other voter services. One voter service that

should be expanded is mandated early absentee voting hours. Instances of municipalities offering weekend or evening hours to absentee vote in person were uncommon, though substantially greater than previous years. Legislation providing resources for and mandating a minimum amount of evening and weekend early absentee hours should be considered, particularly for larger municipalities.

The strong guidance given by the secretary of state's office to municipalities on curing signature defects was crucial in keeping the absentee ballot rejection rate remarkably low. It is important that similarly strong instructions be preserved for all future elections through either agency rules or preferably through legislation. The lack of legislation around mandatory signature cure was a source of litigation this year, and passing legislation permanently enshrining strong signature cure practices would prevent this issue from returning in the future.



IMPROVING CONSISTENCY OF INFORMATION ACROSS THE STATE

One of the defining features of Maine's elections is their administration by clerks across 500 different municipalities. This local control is a cherished aspect of government in Maine; however, it can produce disparities in information made available to voters. This was particularly apparent during the primary, where the League received numerous reports of voter confusion about postage costs and other issues. While voter information improved for the general election, many municipal websites included incorrect or incomplete information, and voters still faced significant differences in access to voting information by municipality. Expanding the informational materials the secretary of state's office provides on its website and for municipalities to share with voters could go a long way in improving voter access to information, all across Maine.

ENSHRINING THE ROLE OF NONPARTISAN OBSERVATION

While the League was able to run a large nonpartisan election observation program this year, one challenge was the fact that the law does not require space to be provided for nonpartisan observers. Maine law is very clear that space must be provided for an observer with each of the three official parties, however, it is silent on the role of nonpartisan observers. While observers were able to work with local officials to determine what level of access could be provided with the challenges faced by COVID-19 space requirements, the need to work on a case-by-case basis demonstrated the deficiencies of the current laws on election observation in Maine. Especially in the wake of this election and the degraded national discourse about election integrity, it is vital to affirm in statute the role

of nonpartisan election observers in validating the electoral process.

There are many more lessons to be learned from this election, and many additional policy areas that will undoubtedly be subjects of discussion, such as online voter registration, true early voting, and more. These lessons learned from the League's work and observations around the 2020 election do not cover the full range of issues to be explored, but do offer some items to consider in direct response to this election. It is our hope that by reflecting on this unprecedented election, Maine can continue to build on its strong tradition of voter access and participation.